

## Reporting on a Scandal

Charlie is an editor on the staff of her high school's newspaper. Recently, she learned that the community service group at her school which raises money for Doctors Without Borders lost its status as a school-approved group.

Talking to former group members, Charlie learned that the group had not functioned according to school rules. For the most part, group members had fundraised instead of engaging in service-based activities like raising awareness. In addition, Jason, the leader of group for Doctors Without Borders, had often awarded service hours in exchange for money raised. Some students, behind on hours, had simply donated chunks of money, up to several hundred dollars, and Jason had signed them off on their community service.

Jason was initially defensive about these allegations and refused to be quoted in the article Charlie was writing. However, Jason later emailed Charlie, asking her not to publish the allegations, saying that they could hurt his college applications. Regretting his poor judgment managing the group, he explained that he had been too caught up in the cause to examine whether his methods were appropriate, and he now wanted to put the situation behind him.

Charlie was unsure how to proceed. She believed that Jason realized he had made a mistake and regretted his actions. She also wanted to respect his privacy, and she knew that releasing the information could damage his reputation among peers and teachers and affect his chances of college admission.

However, Charlie also knew that journalists have a professional obligation to run important stories no matter how controversial they are, and to hold those in power accountable for their actions. Jason's abuse of the system had affected many students by encouraging cheating, and by devaluing the community service experiences of those who had put in hours honestly. Her paper, she felt, ought to expose the wrongdoing.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What responsibility do journalists have to uncover the truth? What responsibility do they have to respect individuals' right to privacy? How should these responsibilities weigh against each other?
2. Should private citizens have a greater right to privacy than public officials? If so, should Jason count as a public official or a private citizen for purposes of a student newspaper story about a student group leader?
3. Suppose that Jason decided to break the rules because he believed that his group could do more good through fundraising than through other activities. Would his behavior be justified in this case? Why or why not?
4. Suppose that Jason did not believe that he acted wrongly, and therefore his only regret was that he got caught. How, if at all, should that change Charlie's thinking about what to do?